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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates the 1990-91 implementation of the Parent Leadership Training Program in Washington State. Teams from each of seven elementary schools received a manual of materials and guidance on recruiting parents, involving teaching staff, and providing support services. They then implemented the program in their schools. The first part of this report on findings from the program addresses parent involvement in workshops. It was found that asking parents to preregister for parent workshops increased the likelihood of their attendance. Child care arrangements that were well-staffed were essential to parents' participation in school programs. Programs providing more time for socialization were more successful. The most effective programs were those which were most interactive. The highest parent attendance occurred when workshop topics were developed from a local interest survey. The second part of the report addresses school staff involvement. It was found that the greater the participation by staff in determining ways to increase parental involvement, the more likely the resultant programs were to succeed. The third part of the evaluation concerns the initiation of school change. Providing a regular forum for parents to voice their concerns increased schools' responsiveness to those concerns. The conclusion summarizes answers to questions raised in the evaluation of the program. (BC)

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EVALUATION OF THE PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

1990-91

Prepared for Citizens Education Center by Dr. Beverly B. McConnell

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EVALUATION OF THE PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM
1990-91

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EVALUATION OF THE PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM 1990-91

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Description of the Program

This report evaluates the 1990-91 implementation of a program called Parent Leadership Training. This is a program designed to enable parents to become effective partners with the school in promoting their children's academic and developmental growth.

The program was developed by Citizens Education Center of Seattle, which is responsible for selecting school sites for its implementation, and providing training and technical assistance to these sites. Primary funding for the program is from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust.

Part One of the evaluation analyzes program strategies to increase the involvement of parents in the program.

Part Two of the evaluation analyzes program strategies to increase the involvement of teaching staff in parental involvement activities.

Part Three analyzes the types of institutional change occuring in participating schools, and the program strategies used to initiate school change in response to parent concerns.

Summary of Primary Findings

PART ONE -- Parental Involvement.

It was found that asking parents to preregister for parent workshops increased the likelihood that they would attend, as well as facilitating

planning. Publicity and recruitment for the workshops was more effective through spoken word than written materials; therefore, presentations at Open House, Kindergarten Orientation, or any other occasion when parents came to the school, increased parent response.

The more personal the invitation, face-to-face or through phone calls, the more likely the parent was to attend. This was especially true for parents that in the past have been less likely to attend school events, including fathers, parents from low income families and from ethnic and language minorities.

Fliers sent home with children and notices in the school newsletter were generally not effective unless linked with more personalized types of recruiting.

Child care arrangements that were well-staffed, with preplanned activities appropriate to different age groups, were essential to parents' continued participation. Preregistration asking numbers and ages of children to attend facilitated good planning. Publicizing the children's program as an opportunity for fun, creative activities had a positive effect, as opposed to referring to it as "free babysitting". Using older students as child care providers was a good experience for them. Supervision to help them plan and prepare activities resulted in excellent children's activity programs.

Initiating the program with a series of weekly workshops on a consistent day of the week during the fall was an effective schedule. A longer gap in time than weekly, or changing days of the week, usually hurt program attendance. A periodic schedule throughout the rest of the school year provided continuity.

The opportunity for social contact seems to be an important factor in parents' comfort with these school events. Programs providing more time for socialization and food consumption were more effective in attracting and keeping parents involved than programs with less time for socializing. Refreshments were important. Meetings which combined a program with a social event such as potluck dinner or dessert were very successful, and attracted more attendance from parents considered "hard to reach" -- minority or low income families. Schools that made use of drawings, door prizes, fun introductions, and ice breakers to help people get acquainted had a much higher return rate of parents than programs which allowed less time for such activity.

Offering parent programs using the Parent Leadership Training model requires a team effort and a great many volunteers. Effective implementation was found to require attention to expressing appreciation for these contributions, recognition of parents and presenters, publicity for business partners and community people who assist.

The most effective programs were those which were most interactive, i.e., devoted relatively less time to presentations or videos in which the audience was primarily listening, and more time to large or small group discussion and hands-on activities.

For parent groups involving one or more subgroups of parents who speak a language other than English, presentation in English with translation into other languages was a less effective format than having simultaneous presentation in other languages and discussion within the primary language subgroups. This is because the translation process inhibits group interaction -- parents are far more willing to offer comments or ask questions within their own language subgroup than in a

larger group where it must be translated. Using the simultaneous presentation format requires advance preparation for staff who will do the presentations in other languages as subgroup leaders. These presenters need to be given the presentation information in advance of the meeting so they can then present it in their own words in the other languages required.

The greatest attendance by parents occurred when topics for workshops were developed from a local interest survey. Attendance was also greater at any workshop where parents knew that teachers from their child's class or grade level would be a participant, presenter or discussion leader. Topics which utilized teacher presenters tended to be grade or age specific -- explaining curriculum or methods of instruction they used, tips on how parents could help children learn reading or math, child development characteristics at different ages, and homework expectations at different grade levels. High interest topics were also parent/student conferences and how to make them better, and transition to middle school.

PART TWO -- School Staff Involvement

The more widespread participation by school staff in the decision to seek ways to increase parental involvement, the more likely the program is to succeed. The broader based the team chosen to implement the program, the more likely the program will be effective. A broadly based program team includes one or more administrator, teachers, specialists, any personnel in parent contact positions, parents and some member from the community.

Training for staff which gives them information from research on the importance of parent involvement to children's academic success, increases

commitment to the program. It also can provide outreach skills and greater cross-cultural understanding resulting in improved program effectiveness.

Offering roles to classified staff, specialists, and community people broadens the base of support for the program making it more likely the effort will be sustained. More roles by more people helps prevent burnout by the team members carrying responsibility for the program.

Varying the format of parent involvement from workshops to interactive programs, in which parents and children are together in an activity setting with teachers, will broaden the participation by teaching staff and attract some parents who are not comfortable in the workshop setting.

The most effective way to secure teacher involvement is to request their assistance with a particular task at a particular time rather than issuing general requests for "participation" or "support" of the program.

PART THREE -- Initiating School Change.

Schools offering parent leadership training programs became sensitized to ways in which the school could be made more welcoming to parents, and reported they had made many small changes to make it more "user friendly" to the families it serves. These usually took the form of welcoming signs, maps, and posted pictures which made it easier to identify people in the building and find people or places the parent might be seeking. It also included bulletin boards devoted to parent interests and activities, and waiting or reception areas designed for parent comfort and convenience. It included more attention to home/school communications -- making them understandable and focused.

Providing a regular forum through which parent views and concerns could be voiced to school staff increased the school's responsiveness to these concerns and resulted in many changes in program or policy at sites implementing parent leadership training. These included changes in the physical facility (lighting added for safety), schedules for kindergarten children, types of orientation and open house programs held, flexibility of parent conference procedures, improving access to phones, changes in school lunch programs and bus procedures. The process of implementing a Parent Leadership Training program appears to provide a means of initiating institutional change.

This year was a preliminary attempt at evaluation of this process, but some program factors identified as facilitating school change were: use of surveys to parents and teaching staff, a team with the responsibility for responding to this input, increased visibility and regular access to school personnel in a comfortable setting, a school policy in favor of encouraging input from parents on schools programs and policies.

INTRODUCTION

What was the purpose of the program?

The Parent Leadership Training program was developed by Citizens Education Center as a replicable model which schools serving diverse populations could implement in order to enable parents to become effective partners with the school in promoting their children's academic and developmental growth.

Who initiated the program?

It was initiated by Citizens Education Center, in Washington State; a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting better education through citizen action. Primary funding for the Parent Leadership Training Project has come from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust.

Why was the program needed?

The research evidence continues to grow that parent involvement is a key ingredient in children's academic growth and development. Schools which have as their mission maximizing educational opportunity for every child find that to accomplish this mission they must increase their partnership with parents. With our increasingly diverse family patterns, cultural and ethnic diversity, Citizens Education Center felt there would be much to gain by both teachers and parents from communication which enables them to work together to promote the growth of children.

The Parent Leadership Training model focuses on opening two-way communication between parents and school about children. It utilizes a

series of workshops, as well as other types of programs involving parents and children. It's goal is to provide an ongoing forum where parents can talk with each other and with teachers about ways to interact with children to help them develop academic and other life skills. It also provides a forum whereby school personnel can regularly be in touch with parent concerns, and by acting on these concerns help make the school more responsive to the families it serves. This type of emphasis is in contrast to Parent Advisory Councils, which focus on school policy, or PTAs which often focus on institutional support for the schools.

How long has Parent Leadership Training existed?

The original model for Parent Leadership Training was developed over a three-year period in the Yakima Valley of Washington. During this development period, the program was given national recognition through its selection by the Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation as an outstanding example of promoting intergenerational learning, involving adults as well as children. It was also featured on television segments shown on Public TV as a noteworthy example of schools reaching out to involve families.

The final year of this development phase, the project was disseminated to twelve other school sites in the state of Washington. This was in 1989-90. This replication phase demonstrated that it is an "exportable" model, capable of being adapted to many different school sites serving very diverse population groups.*

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*A description and evaluation of the development phase and the first year replication is available from Citizens Education Center or through the ERIC system under "Parent Leadership Training Program, An Evaluation", McConnell, Beverly B. ED 327 370.

The Fred Meyer Charitable Trust then funded the program for an additional three-year period, to enable Citizens Education Center to expand the program to additional sites, develop additional training and other materials for its dissemination, and evaluate different aspects of the program and its effectiveness. This evaluation reports on the 1990-91 program year, which is the first year of this new three-year cycle, and represents the second year of dissemination of the program by Citizens Education Center.

How are participating schools selected and what services do they receive?

Individual schools apply (not districts) to Citizens Education Center to participate in the program. If they are accepted for participation, it means that they will receive five days of training (two days in August, two more days in January and one day at the end of the school year in May). At this training, they receive a manual of materials developed by Citizens Education Center with descriptive material necessary to understand and implement the model. It contains checklists for planning, handout materials relating to different topics, suggested workshop topics, guidance on how to effectively recruit parents, how to involve teaching staff, provide support services, etc. The training is very interactive so that teams get a chance to do actual planning for implementation at their site; they also compare and share their problems and successes with other sites, and learn how to avoid "pitfalls" that might jeopardize program success.

Citizens Education Center has also assembled a wealth of research materials useful to sites for presentations made to develop support for the program. This research documents the potential benefits to children if

schools and parents achieve an active partnership. By displaying these research and resource materials at the training workshops, sites can tap into the latest research in the field without having to carry out their own extensive literature search.

Citizens Education Center requires that each school site put together a team that will carry out the program, consisting, ideally, of an administrator, teachers, parents, a community person, and special staff at the school who work closely with parents. Experience has shown that the Parent Leadership Training model cannot be carried out by only one or two individuals, but requires a team. The school site must pay for the time and travel to send its team members to the training, and a minimum fee to Citizens Education Center to cover the costs of the facility used for the training, food served, etc. The rest of the services provided by Citizens Education Center (training staff, ongoing consultation, and program evaluation) are paid for by the grant.

What were the characteristics of the school sites participating?

There were seven sites participating in Parent Leadership Training during the 1990-91 school year. These sites were very diverse as to urban or rural, number of students, and ethnic mix as shown on following page:

FIGURE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATING SITES.

Sites Implementing Parent Leadership Programs 1990-91

Type of School	Geographic Area	School Size	Low Income	Minority
Preschool-Kind.	Urban	225	40%	20%
Elementary	Urban	476	53%	31%
Elementary	Urban	570	23%	23%
Bilingual Center	Urban	170*	100%	100%
Elementary	Small town/rural	446/484*	25%	15%
Elementary	Small town/rural	377	25%	5%
Elementary	Small town/rural	500	25%	2%

**Parents drawn from two schools--combined site.*

THE EVALUATION DESIGN

Outcome Measures Examined

The evaluation had assigned recorders at each site who were asked to keep records on participants and relate this to demographic data based on school records. This provided objective and quantifiable data in parallel form between projects for several indices relating to different aspects of the program (indices are described below). Using these indices, programs were ranked in order of their comparative effectiveness on the following types of program "outcomes" used as a measure of program success:

1) **Participation by a high proportion of parents at the site.**

   This used the **Coverage Index** - the number of parents who attended as a proportion to the number of students in the school.

2) **Keeping their interest as demonstrated by repeat attendance.**

   This used the **Sustained Interest Index** - the frequency of attendance by parents through a series of workshops.

3) **Success in reaching groups considered "hard to reach".**

   This used a series of indices:

   The Economic Index - the proportion of parents attending who were low income, in comparison to the proportion of students in the school who were low income. (Based on students who qualified for free or reduced price lunches.)

   The Ethnic Index - the proportion of parents attending who were ethnic minority, in comparison to the proportion of students in the school who were ethnic minority.

The Language Index - the proportion of parents attending whose home language was not English, in comparison to the proportion of students whose home language was not English.

The Male Index - the proportion of parents attending who were male. This was included because traditionally men have not attended school functions as frequently as women.

4) **Participation by a high proportion of school personnel.**

The Teacher/Principal Index - the number of participants who were teachers or principals, as a proportion of the total employed staff of teachers and principals at the school.

The "Other" School Personnel Index - the number of "other" school participation (i.e., classified staff, specialists such as librarian, counselor, etc.), as a proportion of the employed staff in these "other" categories at the school.

5) **Implementing two-way communication resulting in school change.**

The School Change Index - based on a compilation of reported incidence of response by the school to concerns voiced by parents or changes initiated by school staff designed to make parents feel more comfortable in the school setting.

Process Variables Examined

Assigned recorders at each site were also asked to respond to detailed questionnaires on program strategies used such as:

--methods of recruiting parent participation

--content and conduct of workshops

--incentives used such as transportation, child care, prizes

--methods used to recognize participants and volunteers

--method of making programs responsive to parent concerns

--materials distributed for parents to take home

--methods of recruiting particpation by teachers and other school personnel

--types of changes made by the school to make it "User Friendly", etc.

Analysis

After data from the sites had been compiled for the various indices described above, projects were rank-ordered in terms of their effectiveness on that particular outcome. After determining which sites had been particularly effective in reaching low income or ethnic minority parents, for example, the evaluator then examined the report on program strategies used by these sites (methods of recruitment, content and conduct of meetings, etc.), and compared these to program strategies reported by sites ranked as less effective.

Similarly, after ranking the sites on how fully involved their school staff was in the programs, the analysis compared the program strategies of sites that ranked "highly effective" with the program strategies used by less effective sites.

In this way, the analysis revealed patterns: certain program strategies that resulted in highly effective programs, others that resulted in less effective programs. In this way, the evaluation provides answers to the following evaluation questions.

Evaluation Questions Addressed

What program strategies are most effective in reaching all parents using the Parent Leadership Training model?

What program strategies are particularly effective in reaching parents traditionally considered "hard-to-reach"--fathers, low income, ethnic and language minorities?

What strategies have school sites used that led to more active participation by teachers and other school personnel in parent involvement activities?

How have Parent Leadership Training activities led to institutional change in schools that implement it?

FINDINGS: PART ONE

Involvement of Parents

INTRODUCTION

As described above, sites were ranked for comparative "effectiveness" in reaching parents to involve them in a series of workshops and other activities designed to bring families into school. This was based on a number of indices which looked at how many parents came among those invited; how representative this was of the ethnic and economic makeup of the school; and how well their interest was sustained to come back to additional programs.

Based on this ranking of effectiveness, the program strategies reported by the programs were examined to see what approach was used by each. The following presents analysis of the efforts to involve parents that appeared to be most, and least, effective.

FACTORS RELATED TO PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Recruitment Strategies

Personal Contact. The three schools which had the greatest percentage turnout of parents for their programs each used a great deal of personal contact in recruiting. At one site, nearly every parent was contacted by telephone before the series began. The caller explained the purpose of the workshops to be held, and asked their preferences as to time, location and topics. As this was a multi-ethnic site, this calling was done by bilingual staff who spoke the (six) languages of the parents called. Subsequently translated letters were sent. And follow-up calling was done for many parents before each meeting.

Another of the three sites with the greatest percentage turnout of parents was an early childhood program for preschool and kindergarten children. A presentation was made about the programs to all parents at the orientation meeting for parents at the beginning of school. Then each teacher sent a letter of invitation to parents in that teacher's room. Because the teachers at this site, by mutual agreement, all attended the Parent Leadership workshops, this invitation was more personal than if it had just been advising them of a school event--they were being invited to meet with the teacher at the workshops. Parents were also asked to "preregister" by signing a form indicating that they planned to attend. After this a "classroom parent" called the other parents in the room with a reminder about the workshops.

The third site with a high turnout of parents was an elementary school program. This site used a number of occasions when parents came to the school to speak to them and invite them to the parent workshops.

These occasions included the school open house where they made a presentation about the program and invited parents to stop by a table to register themselves to attend (and their children to attend the child care provided). A similar presentation/chance for registration was done for parents attending kindergarten orientation. Another presentation was made at the first PTA meeting with team members present to talk with parents individually about the program and encourage their attendance. This site had monthly assemblies to honor "students of the month" which were attended by a large number of parents. These assemblies were used to publicize workshops and other activities sponsored by the Parent Leadership team throughout the year.

At this site, notices were sent home describing the workshops and asking parents to return a registration form indicating whether they planned to come, and the ages of children they would be bringing for child care. These forms went out enough in advance of the workshops so parents could plan ahead. Nearer the time of the workshop, the team then called each parent who had preregistered to remind them of the meetings, answer any questions, and confirm the information they had provided. After the meeting they called again any who had registered, but had not come, indicating that they had been missed, encouraging them to attend the rest of the workshops, and offering them copies of the materials which parents had received at the workshop they missed.

Other sites also reported calling families based on registrations to remind them of dates of workshops or to renew their interest (if they had attended in a previous year). Sometimes this calling was done by the teams members, sometimes using parent volunteer callers, sometimes by paid staff who were assigned to coordinate parent activities. Bilingual

teachers or aides were recruited to do calling of non-English speaking families.

At the other end of the ranking, sites which did not have a high percentage of parents attend their programs had almost no personal contact in their recruitment. They relied on publicizing the meetings through posters, the school newsletter and fliers which children carried home. The fliers encouraged parents to attend, but did not ask for a written response. All information on the meetings was at an impersonal "notification" level. Team members reported they spoke about the workshops to any parents they "bumped into", but no preplanned effort was made to phone, visit or recruit parents through personal contact.

Preregistration. The sites most effective in getting parents involved in programs all used a system to register parents in advance of the workshops. By getting parents to indicate their plan to attend, they obtained an estimate of numbers so they could have sufficient chairs, refreshments, handouts, etc. and make arrangements for any parents who needed transportation. In registering, parents also indicated the numbers and ages of children they would be bringing, so the team could ensure that they had enough personnel, craft materials, etc.

All sites that asked parents to register in advance also welcomed parents who came without notice and these registered at the meeting. Not all parents who preregistered actually came at any site. But the process of preregistration not only allowed for better planning, but tended to establish a commitment by the parents which produced much higher attendance than sites which simply advertised the meetings but did not ask for an RSVP.

Follow-up recruitment. The most effective sites also did follow-up recruitment throughout the initial series of workshops, and for later meetings in the year. In one site, this was a newsletter recapping what had happened at the last workshop, announcing topics and times for the next workshop, and publicly thanking all those who had helped with the workshops. Another site sent personal letters to all who had registered (whether or not they had attended the last workshop)--encouraging them to come to other workshops scheduled. At one site all of the parents who were non-English-speaking were called to convey plans for the next workshop. Many sites called those who had registered but not come to encourage them to attend future workshops.

Fliers carried home by children and notices in school newsletters. All sites reported giving children fliers to take home to parents and publicizing the availability of the workshops through the school newsletter. This appears to be the standard method of publicizing school events. As reported by several sites, it also appears to be a method which will: 1) not be seen by a large number of parents; and 2) be ignored by others who assume the information is for someone else if it has not been their practice to attend school functions (unless specifically requested--such as for parent conferences).

One site, seeking the largest possible turnout for a program dealing with the transition from elementary to middle school, sent out such notices and then had room mother volunteers call all the fifth grade families to urge them to attend. A large percentage of those called said that they were very interested in attending and that they had not seen any of the information the school had put into newsletters and fliers. This same

report was given by other sites who combined calling and written notices--the callers found that the parents were unaware of the written notices.

A survey to parents done by one school asked parents for information about home/school communications and how it could be improved. Parents reported that there was a LARGE AMOUNT of paper coming home; so much that is was very difficult to tell what was and was not important. This site subsequently adopted a number of changes in what and how children were given information to take home. It now goes out only once a week, in special folders, where it is sorted so notices and newsletters to parents are separated from children's workpapers, artwork, etc.

To call attention to information sent home about parent leadership programs, most sites developed a logo which "flagged" their materials for attention.* One site always used a distinctive colored paper as a cover sheet for all printed matter relating to the workshops. Another method used to increase the likelihood of parents seeing or paying attention to information on the programs was to have children personalize the invitation to the workshops by writing in their parents' name and decorating it in some way. Having a place for parents to sign and asking them to return something (the above mentioned preregistration forms) also appeared to draw attention to printed matter the child carried home.

All of these methods may help improve the value of fliers and newsletter notices, but it is clear that primary reliance on fliers and newsletter publicity will not result in an effective increase in overall

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*A collage of site logos are displayed on the cover of this evaluation.

parental involvement. And it will be totally ineffective in reaching the groups of parents who have not traditionally attended school functions.

Recruiting through students. This year and last, the sites that were most effective in reaching parents also were sites which used student volunteers in many roles associated with the workshops. Students were recruited to make posters about the workshops. Students were asked to personalize messages that were sent home. Older students were asked to assist with child care activities during the workshops, and at one site this also involved attending a meeting each week to plan the activities and prepare craft materials. The involvement of their older children with the workshops helped to increase parental awareness of the program.

Some sites made a practice of giving teachers the names of parents from their room who had attended the parent workshop, and (at one site) the teacher gave the students "cougar tracks" for their parents' attendance (earning them points in a sort of reward system used within the classroom). At another site where parents were asked to return notices indicating if they did or did not plan to attend, a reward was offered the class with the greatest rate of return.

One site where the child care activities included some very clever craft projects reported that the children brought things they had made to school the next day and showed them off -- causing other children to ask where they got them.

All of these strategies might be called "feeding the grapevine" -- that is, making it more likely that students would talk about the program with their parents and encourage them to attend.

Recruitment of special groups.

Fathers. Fathers were considered a "special group" because traditionally they have been less likely to attend school functions than mothers. All sites were asked to keep track of how many males attended as a percentage of total parent attendance. They were also asked to report any special efforts they had made to increase attendance by fathers.

The highest attendance by fathers was among ethnic minority families. This probably reflects some cultural differences on the role of father and mother in the family, and the unwillingness of women to attend public meetings by themselves. It may also be related to the fact that nearly all the ethnic minority families who did attend workshops responded to "requests" for their attendance (as opposed to a notice that a program was available inviting "anyone interested"). Fathers may be more likely to attend if specifically invited.

Another site with a high percentage of fathers attending indicated that they "tried to encourage fathers to attend through phoning".

Two other sites made a bid for attendance by fathers by choosing fathers as presenters, and by sending out notices about the meetings with illustrations (cartoons) in which a man was the parent shown interacting with the child. Both these sites had "medium" rankings on percentage attendance by male parents.

Another site reported that they had a request that a way be found to notify non-custodial parents of school events since these parents would not receive notices carried home by the children. It was not clear whether this request was acted upon -- this site had some non-custodial parents attending their workshops, but overall had a low percentage of fathers in attendance.

Ethnic and language minority parents. For these parents, personal contact appeared to be nearly essential -- very few minority families attended at any site that failed to do personalized recruiting.

Parents who did not speak English were not likely to come unless they felt assured they would be able to understand what was going on. In the past, Parent Leadership Training sites offered separate groups doing parallel presentations in different rooms, one in English and one conducted in Spanish. The meetings conducted in Spanish drew many Spanish-speaking parents who would not otherwise have attended.

The site serving all immigrant children was successful by having parents sit in language groups with someone who spoke their language. Several simultaneous presentations were then made to parents in their own language. This worked best if the presenters had been briefed on the information in advance so they could present in their own words instead of having parents sit through a presentation in English which was stopped periodically for translation. Parents were willing to discuss and ask questions within a subgroup where they all spoke the same language -- they usually did not ask questions within a larger group where their question and the answer would both have to be translated.

Non-English-speaking families frequently depend on their children as translators. Sites reported a higher percentage attendance of minority families for activities where children and adults were together (potlucks, "fairs", events featuring interactive activities between parents and children, events where children's work was displayed such as science fairs).

Sites where non-English-speaking families were offered a translator, who was unknown to them, were not successful. Parents usually made an

excuse not to come, or said they would come (to be polite), but failed to show up.

Low income parents. One site which reported a special effort to reach low income parents said they did it "through personal contacts". This site was among the most successful in the attendance by parents from low income families. Another said they made a point to put posters and send fliers home to reach parents in "the projects". This was not notably successful.

As reported above in reference to ethnic minority families, the programs which were less formal (potluck, pizza feed, picnic), and those which involved parents and children together, had a higher percentage attendance by low income parents.

Effective recruitment strategies are summarized in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

What Recruitment Strategies Increase Involvement by Parents?

*Asking parents to preregister.
*Recruiting in face-to-face settings.
*Personal phone calls.
*Follow-up phone calls and personal letters.
*Recruiting through involvement of students.
*Calling attention to publicity through use of logos, colored paper, personalization, RSVP.

Child Care Arrangements

All sites provided child care and reported that this was essential in order for many parents to attend. Exciting activities for children also appeared to be a "positive recruitment tool" as reported by one school site. "Children enjoyed themselves so much they wanted to come back". The site that made this comment had one of the highest ratings in terms of percentage of parents whose interest was sustained to come back to additional workshops.

A description of the child care arrangements from this site will demonstrate the level of their planning for children's activities:

> "...We provided child care in three group settings. Birth to kindergarten -- this program was planned and run by a specially selected group of sixth grade girls we called "The Child Care Providers". They were supervised and encouraged by the Child Care Coordinator. Their commitment involved not only the four Tuesday child care sessions, but also four Friday meetings to choose a theme, plan the craft, song, and story, and do any cutting or gathering of materials that were needed...
>
> ...First to third grade -- this program's activities were planned by the child care coordinator. All the "stations" were set up Tuesday afternoon by the Coordinator; then the seventh grade helpers and adult supervisor were briefed early Tuesday evening. We chose seventh grade helpers for this group because we had several of our sixth grade child care providers from last year that wanted to return...
>
> ...Fourth to Sixth Grade -- these children were allowed...to do crafts or they could choose to go to the adjacent playshed to play basketball, 4-square, jump rope, or hula hoop. They were supervised by one adult. Some paper craft projects were set up in the hallway for them to do...we also encouraged the older children to help the younger ones."

Four of the seven sites in this year's evaluation did use student helpers from fifth or sixth grade in their child care program (as well as high school students and adults, some of whom were volunteers and some paid). A fifth program also used student helpers, but in this case recruited through the Camp Fire Girls organization. This site indicated that they preplanned activities for the child care program and got this information to the Camp Fire leaders two weeks in advance of the workshops, which gave the girls and their leader time to prepare for these activities. They then also held a brief orientation in the evening just before the child care was offered. This site reported a high level of satisfaction with their child care program.

One site reported that their "Child care included activities based on topics presented to the parents attending the workshops. The team felt this would bring parents and children together to talk about what was going on during the session." This included things like the use of wordless books, math activities the family could do together, and various games that promoted academic skills.

The sites that put a lot of planning and effort into child care activities tended to promote it in their advertising for the workshops -- not stressing simply that "babysitting" was provided, but that all sorts of fun activities for children would be provided. One site referred to its program as "KID'S CLUB". This has a different connotation than advertising "free babysitting". "Babysitting" is an offensive term to most children by the time they reach elementary school age, and it doesn't convey the idea of something fun; only that supervision will be provided so no one will get hurt.

Only two sites provided very little information that indicated much preplanning had been done for child care. In one site, the child care seems

to have been very much a "babysitting" operation; i.e., they had only one adult for over twenty children and attempted to keep children occupied by showing a movie one evening and on other evenings letting them use various equipment -- videos, puzzles, games and art materials to amuse themselves. The other site simply provided no information on what children's activities were arranged except that it did use student helpers. These two sites ranked among the three lowest on the "sustained interest" index of project effectiveness; i.e., had the fewest number of parents returning for additional workshops.

Effective child care planning practices are summarized in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3. CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

What Were Effective Strategies for Providing Child Care?

*Advance registration to get an estimate of numbers and ages of children coming.

*Advertising fun activities for children so that they wanted to come, and come back.

*Sufficient help to provide lots of attention.

*Interesting craft projects providing things children can take home.

*Preplanned activities for different age levels.

*Selecting older students as helpers and making it an "honor" and a rewarding experience for them.

Convenience Factors: Schedules and Transportation

Schedules. The Citizens Education Center recommended to sites that they start in the fall with a series of four workshops, held once a week on the same day of the week. After this series, the team at each site decided how the workshops or other activities would be carried out throughout the year. Usually they adopted a once-a-month schedule for programs, and many varied the format with some workshops and some other types of programs -- social or interactive programs in which parents participated with their children, etc. Most programs were held in the evening, but one site planned a Spring activity at noon and in the early afternoon to try to accommodate parents for whom a daytime schedule might be better.

All but one site followed this schedule. The one site that did not separated their initial series of workshops, holding them from two to four weeks apart, and used different days of the week. This was not the schedule of choice for this site, but was necessitated by circumstances beyond their control. All the same, it was not very successful -- this site had the lowest ranking of all sites on the "sustained interest" index.

In the first year of the replication, a similar pattern was found: the most effective programs were those meeting once a week and sticking to the same day of the week. Sites that changed days of the week or separated their workshops by longer or irregular periods of time were less successful in keeping parents involved.

Five of the schools held their workshops for one and a half hours, one site used only one hour, and one site met for two hours. All sites reported parents satisfied with this period of time.

Transportation. Most sites did not offer transportation feeling that it was not practical or was not needed. Some did offer a "call-in" phone number that parents could use to request transportation. When someone did call in, transportation was provided by a member of the team in their personal car.

Only one site offered extensive transportation services. This was the urban site serving non-English-speaking immigrant families drawn from two different schools. This site felt that, for their parents, offering transportation was extremely important. Being new to this country, many did not have private vehicles yet, and being unfamiliar with English they found it difficult to find their way around, ask for help, or use the public transportation system. In addition, some families lived in areas not considered very safe to walk in after dark.

Providing transportation did not go smoothly, however, and the site recorder provided an analysis of what went wrong, together with suggestions that another site might follow if they decided to offer transportation.

Mistake 1: Parents were "offered" transportation and with this population, functioning across cultural differences, it seemed polite to "accept" what was offered, whether you needed it or not, and whether you actually planned to attend or not. A large number of parents initially accepted the offer of transportation (on the basis of which the program rented two large vans), and subsequently backed out and did not attend after all.

Recommendation: It is better to get parents to request transportation than to offer it to everybody. The program switched to

using a "call-in" number with a deadline so that parents were asked to call in by a certain time if they needed transportation.

Mistake 2: Pick-up points were designated so the van drivers could pick up parents in groups rather than at their homes. Many parents were either unable to unwilling to go to a pick-up point. In addition, the van driver did not get to the pick-up points on schedule because of heavy traffic, and after waiting a while, many parents went home again and some found their way to the meeting on their own using public transportation. After trying pick-up points, this system was abandoned in favor of picking people up at their homes, which worked better.

Recommendation: It is better to pick people up at their homes than try to use a collective pick-up point. It is also better to go with smaller vehicles each making a few pick-ups than a large one making a grant many. This site recommended no more than five stops per vehicle and less, if possible, to keep the pick-up and delivery time shorter, and make it more likely that the pick-up can be on time.

This site always took many more people home than they picked up for the meetings. This raises the possibility that people could get to meetings on their own (ask someone to drop them off, or take public transportation early in the evening before it gets really dark), if they knew they could get a ride home after the meeting. This may be an alternative way to provide transportation.

The information on effective practices regarding schedules and providing transportation is summarized in Figures 4 and 5.

FIGURE 4. SCHEDULES

What is an Effective Schedule for Parent Leadership Training?

*A fall series of workshops one week apart.
*Holding workshops consistently the same day of week.
*Evening meetings one to two hours in length.
*Subsequent workshops/activities approximately monthly to maintain momentum.

FIGURE 5. TRANSPORTATION

What Strategies Were Effective Relative to Providing Transportation?

*Having a call-in number to request transportation.
*Providing rides in personal cars or small vans so no one car or van has to make too many stops.
*Possibly offering rides home to any who could use it.

Opportunity for Socializing

The opportunity to get acquainted with others, to visit, to socialize, appeared to be an important ingredient of effective Parent Leadership programs. Some of this occurred (by planning) before and after the meetings; the rest during the meetings.

One very effective site reported they encouraged people to come early to visit with one another and they had refreshments ready for those who came early, as well as having a break for refreshments at the meeting. The child care providers were on hand both before and after the meeting to accommodate those who arrived early or stayed after the meetings to visit with other parents or with school staff.

Another site got local restaurants to contribute gift certificates good for free dinners and announced that those who got to the meetings early (an attempt to get people there on time) would get to participate in the drawing for these dinners (done at the start of the meeting). This was so successful it surprised everybody (required some reorganization of facilities to accommodate the crowd).

Recorders from several sites reported that people stayed late to visit -- and they accommodated this by having the child care program available for fifteen to twenty minutes after the meeting.

A number of schools held one meeting which was at least half socializing with a potluck dinner or dessert, a picnic, and in one site a catered "pizza feed". These were always reported as highly successful sessions. The "meeting" part of the evening usually took place first, and the children were then brought back to share the food part of the evening. Part of the success of these sessions came from the presence of "extended family" that were invited to participate. It is notable that a much higher

proportion of the groups considered hard to reach (fathers, low income and minority families and fathers) came to these meetings which combined a social focus and a program.

The more effective sites also devoted more time during their meetings for "ice breaker" activities. Family bingo seemed to be a favorite used by more than one site. Prizes were given for this. These sites also used door prizes (usually donations from local business). The prizes themselves were usually insignificant, but the activities and giving of prizes (often done humorously) set an informal atmosphere for the programs where participants felt increased sharing and produced a "comfort level" which made parents willing to come back.

Seating arrangements were often used to help people get acquainted. One site asked people to sit in groups randomly determined by numbered names tags. Another initially had parents with their child's teacher and in later meetings had them seated in other combinations to enable them to get acquainted with more people.

A summary of findings on effective means of creating opportunities for socializing is shown in Figure 6 which follows:

FIGURE 6. SOCIALIZING

What are Effective Ways of Creating Opportunities for Socializing?

*Use of ice breaker activities.

*Assigning seating in small groups by some means that encourage conversations with new people.

*Combining a meeting with a social event such as a potluck dessert or dinner.

*Allowing more time for socializing within the meeting.

*Encouraging socializing before and after the meeting by having the facility open early, refreshments and child care available before and after sessions.

Giving Recognition to Participants

A common characteristic of the more effective parent leadership sites was they they provided a good deal of detail on ways they had found to give recognition to those taking part in the programs. These sites also tended to report more staff taking part and a great many volunteers involved. Less successful sites indicated much less visibility for the program, and gave fewer examples of means the team used to recognize and extend appreciation to parents, staff and volunteers who participated.

A second year site, which was among the most effective both years it has participated in parent leadership training, reported:

> "During the introduction of the meeting, all team members, staff members, volunteers and families were verbally acknowledged. The last page of our Handout Packet was acknowledgements of all the people, families, and businesses, who participated. We delivered Thank You cards to administration, staff, volunteers, team members, and participants the following day. Our families were thanked in the following week's School Newsletter and PTA Newsletter.
>
> Since this was our final fall workshop, the last few minutes were reserved for acknowledgements; we presented each one of our Child Care Helpers with a token gift and a Certificate of Accomplishment. Our team members were recognized and presented certificates as well as the people who faithfully volunteered many hours."

This school also had a large display board featuring information about the parent leadership program and pictures of parents and staff interacting at parent leadership meetings. This was hung in an entrance area where parents would see it when visiting the building, and it would be quite visible to all the staff and students as well.

Several other sites also gave recognition to the program and its participants by taking pictures and posting them for public display at the meetings. These included candid shots taken during workshops. It also included posed pictures of parents with their children which had been taken of all participants. These pictures with captions were later displayed in a "parent nook" at the school -- a seating area for visiting parents with materials of interest to parents.

Other sites with effective programs did similar things--gifts to child care providers and public acknowledgement and praise of their efforts,

gifts to team members and presenters, publicizing the community businesses that supported the program and asking parents to patronize them and express thanks for their support. One team brought a community member who had helped in many ways as a guest to the final training/celebration sessions given by Citizens Education Center and made a public presentation of an award for his special contribution at the dinner meeting.

Most sites asked parents to fill out evaluation forms which asked how they liked the programs, the child care, etc. These were usually full of positive comments. The team made sure these positive comments got back to those who had been praised.

The Parent Leadership Training model requires a team effort and many volunteers to implement it effectively. The experience of the first two years seems to indicate that sustaining this level of involvement can only be done with much attention to expressing appreciation to those who help make it go. A summary of findings on effective ways to give recognition to participants in parent leadership training is shown in Figure 7 on the next page.

FIGURE 7. GIVING RECOGNITION

What Ways Have Effective Sites Used To Give Recognition to Participants?

*Personal thank you notes to presenters, volunteers, team members and participants.

*Publicizing names in school or PTA newsletters.

*Bringing in volunteers for public thanks and applause.

*Gifts to those who helped.

*Posting pictures and names in public places.

*Publicizing gifts from local businesses and asking patrons to thank them personally.

Content and Conduct of Meetings

For the evaluation, the recorder from each program site was asked to indicate how their time was allocated at each meeting between:

Presentations (audience primarily listening)

Questions to Speaker (one person at a time speaking while whole audience listened)

Small Group Discussions (simultaneous sessions with many people talking -- this would also include hands-on activities such as making wordless books, practicing math games that could be used at home)

Informal Time for Socialization (many people talking)

The conduct of meetings was one in which the sharpest contrast could be seen between programs that were effective on the "sustained interest" scale, i.e., those that kept parents involved through a series of meetings, and those that did not. High ranking programs had much more time in discussion and hands-on activities. Less effective programs relied heavily on presentations and recorded little interaction. "No questions were asked.", "The presentation took too much time and there wasn't time for questions." were typical recorder's comments. "The...video was shown during the entire session."

An insightful comment from one recorder was, "Perhaps next time we should involve some of the parents in the audience in the role play activities so it would feel less like we were putting on a show for them."

This is not to say that workshops devoted almost entirely to presentations were not appreciated -- parents often praised them highly, "took notes", "ordered their own copy of the video", but they did not come back. The two sites in which the majority of parents who attended came only once were sites which reported the least time spent in interactive discussion and the most time spent listening to or watching presentations.

Even within sites, a pattern existed wherein the workshops in which the greatest amount of time was devoted to discussion and the least time to presentation would be described by the local recorder as: "This was perhaps our most successful session. Parents were especially excited about the opportunity to work with teachers in small groups and problem solve..."

The Citizens Education Center manual given to participating schools during the training proposes a number of different topics for workshops providing a wealth of materials that can be used for background on the

topic, for handouts to participants. Picking one of these for the initial session, the more effective sites usually surveyed parents as to their interest in possible topics (usually offering a list of possibilities with space to add others not on the list). Adapting the program to local interests in this way seems to be effective. One recorder, commenting on a workshop they had held, noted that it was an especially good workshop, but was not well attended "possibly because it was not a parent-generated topic".

Sometimes the topics used were generated by local or outside circumstances. One site responded to a controversial situation relating to bus routes with a special workshop on school bussing. The recorder described the small group discussion that took place at this workshop:

> "Each group of parents was given a scenario or situation that occurs regularly on the bus and we let the parents work out the resolution. Some examples: What does the bus driver do when students continue to get out of their seats while the bus is moving? Students and drivers complain the bus is too noisy. Should bus drivers assign seats? Should bus drivers have "silent" runs? What do drivers do if students are smoking on the bus?"

People in charge of bus transportation were at the workshop to explain how routes were drawn up, what rules were established by local policy and what is mandated by state regulations, etc. It was reported as a very successful session. Bus routes were not changed (the original source of controversy), but there was a favorable reaction to the school's response to the issues raised.

Other schools, hearing about the workshop, requested more information about it, as the school bussing controversy seems to be a common concern.

Another workshop adaptation to local conditions was part of a workshop devoted to: "What to Do When You Are Snowbound and the Power Is Out". Early in the Gulf War conflict, one school held a workshop on: "Helping Children Handle the Stress of War". They reported many people attended that workshop who were parents of preschool children not yet in school, because of publicity opening it to the general public.

Within sites, there were workshops that were favorites and others less successful. There were some observable patterns across sites about sessions described by local recorders as "best liked", or ones which were the best attended. The "best attended" were very frequently the sessions in which the most teachers took part. The topics were often grade or age specific: characteristics of children at different ages; description of curriculum used at different grade levels; homework--what is expected at different grade levels; tips on how to help your child with reading or math at different grade levels. Frequently, the local team asked teacher representatives at different grade levels to lead small groups discussing these topics. Teachers volunteered to make handouts that would be useful, or to make presentations. These were topics that generated the most questions, opened discussion, and resulted in much sharing.

Usually parents were told in advance that there would be teacher representatives for each grade level at the workshop and this was always a positive incentive to attendance. From workshop statistics, it would appear that the more likelihood that their child's teacher would be present, or would be aware that they were or were not in attendance, the greater the probability that the parent would attend. These topics also were better attended by low income parents than more general topics such as, "Who Works for the Schools?" or "Positive Discipline".

Another topic used at every site that usually was very well-attended and well-liked was on parent conferences. A key to the success of this session was in the degree to which it was interactive. "What Should I Ask?", with some written scenarios to prompt discussion, was an effective format. "What Should Families Tell the Teacher?" was a good prompt for discussion as parents tend to think of conferences as places where teachers tell them things and this opens the idea that the teacher needs and wants information from them. Quite frequently, sites reported that this session led to a number of concerns raised by parents that resulted in school changes in how parent teacher conferences were held.

Another topic that drew a very large response was on transition from elementary to middle school. Possibly owing to communication between sites through which information was shared, sites followed similar formats for this session with very favorable results. One step was to survey parents and students on their concerns about this transition. From this, a list of questions and issues was made available to presenters.

Kids wanted to know such things as:

"Do we get to pick our classes?"
"Can you share a locker with a friend?"
"Will I have to take a shower?..."

Parents wanted to know such things as:

"Are athletics available to all?"
"What is the discipline plan?"
"What courses are required? What electives offered?"
"Is there help for children with special needs?..."

One site put out a printed handout with the answers to some of these questions.

The survey process seemed to be a very helpful one for generating interest in attending the meeting -- parents and students came expecting to get answers to real concerns.

Sites reported extra recruitment was done for this session -- extra telephoning (the team called, or a phone tree was set up, or classroom volunteer parents would call). Students were invited to attend as well as parents -- some parts of the program were together, and some separate for students. The session often entailed a tour of the facilities.

One site had parents rotate through rooms with people designated to discuss different topics such as: 1) activities, clubs, athletics; 2) attendance and health policies; 3) discipline and the point system; 4) scheduling, report cards, and academics; 5) special programs. There was a sixth room where parents just had a chance to talk to other parents who had children already attending the middle school to bring up any topics that was a burning concern to them. Similarly, the students attending had a chance to visit with other students.

Some schools participating in Parent Leadership Training reported that they had held workshops in the past on transition to middle school and that these were typically poorly attended. By following the principles of the Parent Leadership model, these workshops were much more effective. One such principle is that communication must be two-way between parent and school -- hence, the care taken to find out parent and student concerns and to respond to them. The second principle is that schools need to reach out to parents -- hence the extra effort put into recruiting parents and students to attend. The third principle is that the workshops need to be interactive -- a place where there can be questions raised and discussion engaged in. The reports on the workshops held by sites on this topic

indicated that these principles were followed, and the workshops were reported to be well-attended and quite successful in the eyes of participants.

The final observation on the conduct of parent leadership training sessions was that effectiveness was related to the comfort level of participants. Most of the school staff involved in the sessions were also parents. Therefore, the Citizens Education Center training suggested that wherever possible they personalize what they were saying, talk about their own family, present themselves as parents first rather than stressing their roles as professional educators or administrators. This served to open the meeting to more sharing by parents. One site reported:

> "Sessions became very personal by the second and third sessions. Five staff members have children attending the (school) so it was easy to share from dual perspectives."

Another site reported after their third session:

> "At this point, our participants were beginning to feel very comfortable with each other and individuals began to share very personal and emotional things with each other, both in small groups and large groups."

The summary of findings relative to the content and conduct of meetings is shown in Figure 8, which follows.

FIGURE 8. CONTENT AND CONDUCT OF WORKSHOPS

What are Common Elements in the Content and Conduct of Workshops at Effective Sites?

*More time spent in interactive discussion; less time spent in presentations.

*Selecting topics responsive to local interests and events.

*Topics specific to grade levels with teachers as presenters and discussion leaders. Such as:

--Characteristics of children at different ages.
--Curriculum used by grade level.
--Homework--what is expected by grade level.
--Tips on how to help children in reading and math by grade level.

*Workshop on parent/teacher conferences.

*Open sharing as parents by presenters rather than stressing their role as professional educators.

FINDINGS: PART TWO

Involvement of School Staff

INTRODUCTION

The 1989-90 evaluation of the Parent Leadership Training program focused primarily on the parents: what program efforts led to greater program involvement by parents. The 1990-91 evaluation has added a new dimension to the evaluation which is focused on school staff: what program efforts led to greater involvement by school staff in parental involvement programs?

In part, this new dimension grew out of the 89-90 findings which were that the team at each school tended to carry nearly all of the responsibility for the programs and that teachers who were not members of the team were only minimally involved. Realizing that the research shows that it is the PARTNERSHIP between school and parent that yields the greatest benefits for the child, Citizens Education Center focused much of their attention in the current year on how to broaden support for parent involvement activities within the school staff.

The evaluation, therefore, added a new ranking of program effectiveness based on the level of school staff involvement in the parental involvement programs. This was based on data provided by the sites on: number of teachers, administrators, and support personel attending parent involvement activities (or providing support for the program through child care, preparation of materials, etc.) as a proportion of the numbers of these types of personnel within the school. It was also based on the variety of roles played by school personnel and the frequency of their involvement.

On the basis of these data, the sites were ranked in their effectiveness of getting a broad base of support form school personnel. Of

the seven 1990-91 sites, four sites were ranked as 'high', two as 'medium' and one as 'low'.

Recorders at each site were also asked to provide details on what strategies had been used at that site to increase participation in the parent involvement programs. These were related to site rankings to see what strategies were associated with higher levels of school personnel involvement.

FACTORS RELATED TO PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Prior Commitment

The top ranking site explained the process by which they got into the Parent Leadership Training Program. During the spring of the previous school year, they conducted a survey to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their present program. They decided, on the basis of this survey, that there was a need and a desire to have more parent involvement. They saw advertisements for the Parent Leadership Training Program, applied, and were accepted. The subsequent willingness of all staff to participate and help with the program therefore grew out of a group decision on the importance of parent involvement in which all had participated.

As the recorder for this site explained it:

> "Our staff works as a team and because we had made a group decision that parent involvement was to be our goal for the year, we were committed to making it successful."

Another of the top ranking sites also went into the program on the basis of a commitment by teachers and a group decision that all would

participate. This site obtained very little support from the school administration and the program rested entirely on the teaching staff who were willing to do it because they believed it was important.

Staff Training

One of the four top ranking sites reported that the single most important thing they did to achieve an effective program was to hold a one-day training session for all staff before the program began. A trainer from Citizens Education Center helped with this training. She presented an overview of what research has shown to be the importance of parental involvement in children's learning, and the types of parental involvement that make the most difference. The staff was already convinced of the importance of parental involvement and had made a commitment that increasing parent involvement would be a priority for them in the coming year. However, this training tended to reinforce that commitment.

The training also allowed them to review as a group the present level of parent involvement, and do planning for improved parent participation. It enabled them to work on improving specific skills, such as methods of making positive contact with parents.

Keeping School Staff Informed

All of the school sites presented information about the program at a staff meeting in the beginning of the year to explain its purpose and encourage their participation. The difference in sites came in the effort put into continuing information to staff.

The more effective sites tended to put out publicity about the meetings after every workshop -- publicizing the names of staff who had

participated, parents who had participated, and thanking all those who made a contribution to putting it on. The craft projects completed in the children's activity rooms during the workshops kept appearing at school at one site so that teachers were aware of the workshops through the students.

These sites used a staff bulletin to report on what happened at the workshops. It gave feedback to staff on any issues raised by parents attending the workshops.

In addition to information, effective sites consulted with staff. They were asked for suggestions for workshop topics. Staff were consulted on what would be the most convenient dates for two spring workshops. Before the workshop on parent/teacher conferences, staff were consulted for ideas on what information they would like to have from parents. After the workshop, they were asked if they had noticed a difference in how prepared parents were for conferences -- what information they provided, what they asked. Informally, and at staff meetings, staff was asked for feedback they had received from parents relating to the workshops.

The site with the lowest general participation by staff in their program reported that the team felt it "had not been very visible subsequent to the fall workshops" and the recorder was not sure what teachers thought about the program. There was no mention from this site of further general information to staff beyond the initial presentation. This site reported that four teachers had participated by request in one workshop, and one other teacher had attended some meetings out of curiosity. Beyond that, the responsibility for the program at that school seems to have fallen entirely on team members. The recorder observed

that they had not noticed any significant changes in staff attitude toward parent/community involvement.

Involving Specialists, Classified Staff and Community People

One site was particularly effective at incorporating the community in support of the Parent Leadership Training program. As part of their recruitment effort, they made presentations about the program at Kiwanis, Lions and the local Chamber of Commerce. They asked community members to assist with specific programs, including a community mental health therapist and one private therapist and the librarian from the public library. They also brought in by invitation some district administrators and had the high school counselor at one meeting, and the two managers of bus transportation at their workshop on bussing.

Another site used videos to show parents some classroom activities and found that their janitor was the perfect person to video the children throughout the day in different classrooms and activities.

Another site mentioned that the frequency of discussion of parent involvement activities and plans at staff meetings had resulted in many creative suggestions from classroom aides.

The sites serving many families who were non-English-speaking relied heavily on classified staff who spoke the languages of the family for both recruitment and translation. One such site participated last year and this year. Last year, the teacher aides took a more active role in presentations and discussion than this year. Last year the presentation was planned in advance and gone over with the aides; then at the meeting, instead of someone presenting in English, with the aides translating for their group of families, the aides made the initial

presentation and conducted the discussion. Parents took an active part in the discussions under this format -- they were willing to make coments and ask questions within their own language group.

This year a translation format was used, with a presentation in English with aides translating. The aides found this more difficult. Sometimes the speaker went on too long before allowing translation so it was difficult to remember what they said; sometimes they started speaking again before the aide had finished with the translation. In addition, the presentation did not have the "freshness" and interest that it had when the aides made the original presentation. The meetings took more time. Less was covered. Above all, most interaction dropped out. The recorder noted: "there were no questions", "no one had any comments". It seems that non-English-speakers will generally not raise comments or ask questions if it has to be translated (into several languages for the benefit of others present) and the response translated back to them. That they had comments and questions was evident by the level of conversation with aides in their own language as the meeting broke up.

Holding Interactive Programs for Parents/Children

At one of the high ranking sites, the spring planning for programs departed from the workshop format and included some events that were all-school events in which parents and students and teachers participated together. Because of this format, more teachers participated than under the workshop format.

One of these interactive events was "Family Math" in which teachers presented instructions for a series of math games which adults and children could play together. This presentation took about 25% of the time,

and for the remaning 75% of the time parents, students, and teachers circulated from table-to-table sampling the math activities and visiting.

Another of the interactive programs was a science carnival with a "game booth atmosphere", to provide "an opportunity for parents/kids and staff to get together to have fun with science" and socialize. Another was a "science fair" in which student projects were on display, and were judged. This was an annual event, and the parent leadership team only added their support and did not "sponsor" it; however, they considered it another opportunity for school personnel and parents to have interaction in support of student learning. The parent leadership team monitored the attendance at these events, and found that attendance by minority and low income families was greater in these less formal settings.

Specific Requests for Teachers' Participation

Some sites asked teachers to provide a "representative" from each grade level to attend each workshop. The purpose was to provide someone for parents to talk to about issues that were grade related. As there were a small group of teachers for each grade level, this plan would enable them to take their turns, without any one teacher feeling imposed upon. It worked fairly well at the sites that tried it, as teachers like to feel they are doing their part in a shared responsibility. However, as there were other teachers present with definite roles to play as members of the team, the representative from that grade might feel that an additional representative wasn't really needed and to let the team teacher become the ongoing representative for that grade.

What seemed to work better was to spread the responsibility for the programs by requesting teacher help in specific ways. If an individual

teacher was asked to help in a specific way, no team ever reported being turned down. Several sites planned topics that were grade related, and asked teachers to come either to present (for example, on homework expectations or curriculum explanation for a particuar grade level), or to participate in small group discussions with parents from that grade level. Several teachers felt they had a particular expertise in curriculum areas such as reading or math, and volunteered to put together "tips on working with children" in these curriculum areas. If teachers were consulted on topics -- ways in which parents could help further learning through a cooperative effort with teachers --they usually volunteered to help with a program on these topics.

One site noted that they tried to keep in mind the "comfort level" of the teachers in submitting their requests for assistance -- presumably asking them to fill a role in which they felt most comfortable. Some sites indicated that they were aiming at asking each teacher to make some contribution to the program "at least once" during the year. Other sites expected more participation that that. The teacher response they got tended to be what they asked for. Teachers tended not to come to workshops based on a vague and general invitation such as "we hope you'll all take an interest in this and come as often as you can".

In general, the broader the participation by school staff, the more enthusiasm for the program and the less "burn-out" by team membesr from the sense that they were doing it all alone and unappreciated.

A summary of findings about effective means of increasing participation by school personnel in parent involvement activities is given in Figure 9 which follows:

FIGURE 9. SCHOOL STAFF PARTICIPATION

What are Effective Ways of Increasing Participation by School Personnel in Parent Involvement Activities?

*Obtaining commitment to the program and to participation in it before start of program.

*Staff training on parent involvement.

*Seeking participation by classified staff, administrators, specialists, and community members, in addition to seeking teacher involvement.

*Keeping school staff informed--before and after events--publishing who attended.

*Survey teachers for topics, seek feedback on parent response to workshops, consult on dates for programs.

*Holding interactive programs with teachers assisting parent-child activities.

*Ask for specific help, at teacher's comfort level, in many types of roles.

*Feature workshops that are grade level specific and suitable for small group discussion and invite teachers as presenters, discussants.

FINDINGS: PART THREE

Initiating School change

INTRODUCTION

Another new focus in the evaluation of the Parent Leadership Training model for the 1990-91 school year was on the school -- what makes a school "parent friendly" -- a school in which parent participation is appreciated, encouraged, and welcomed?

The research makes it clear that students benefit from "partnerships" between schools and parents, but to achieve a partnership may require as much planned effort and as many changes from the school as from the parents.

The 1990-91 school year was an exploratory one to begin to look at school changes in ways of relating to parents. What factors in the implementation of the Parent Leadership Training program seemed to lead to change in ways that make schools more responsive to the families they serve?

In order to evaluate this, recorders at each site were asked to respond to a series of questions such as the following:

USER FRIENDLY SCHOOLS -- What things have happened to make your school a more "user friendly school" for parents? Did this grow out of Parent Leadership in some way?

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION -- In what way has the Parent Leadership process opened up communication so parents feel someone is listening and responding to their concerns?

VEHICLE FOR CHANGE -- In what way has Parent Leadership come to represent a vehicle for change in your school?

SPINOFFS -- Have there been spinoffs in the form of new programs or new activities relating to parents that have come about as a spinoff from the Parent Leadership program?

On the basis of the information provided, the evaluator made a ranking of sites on a "School Change Index", reflecting the magnitude of school changes reported. The evaluator then looked at program factors reported from these sites to see which program factors were associated with more, or less, school change.

In this ranking, there were four sites that ranked as "high" on the school change index, one that ranked as "medium" and two that ranked as "low". The findings are presented below.

TYPES OF SCHOOL CHANGES INITIATED

Changes to Make Schools More "User Friendly"

School teams implementing parent leadership acted upon a great many suggestions for small changes that would make parents feel more welcome. These included making a waiting area for parents coming to the school which was stocked with a variety of resource materials that would be of interest to parents. To make the school seem more welcoming, the schools provided some comfortable chairs. They provided toys for preschool children a parent might bring along in visiting the school. One school did a major makeover of what had been a pretty gloomy entrance (this school was operating in temporary facilities). This included use of bright colors, stuffed animals, and adding more light.

Several schools wanted to make the school seem more welcoming and make it easier to find and identify people a parent might want to see. This was done by adding a sign outside the school, posting signs and maps inside the school, putting up photographs with identifying information to help people recognize and call by name the people they were looking for. They put pictures of teachers outside their rooms, with their names posted.

To emphasize that parents take an active part in the school, several schools instituted a parent bulletin board. This included pictures of parent involvement activities with captions. It had pictures of team members of the Parent Leadership program, and explained its purpose. On one such bulletin board, parents were encouraged to "sign in" and leave a message. If the message expressed a concern, it would be something that could be responded to. If it expressed appreciation, it would be a public pat on the back for somebody which is a great morale booster.

One school instituted a new policy of making welcoming phone calls to all families. One put out a "parent handbook" with information that would be helpful but might not be easy for a new parent to discover. Other schools reported they are planning to make parent handbooks.

One school was concerned that communication between shcool and home not be dominated by "problem" calls, and instituted a plan for regular calling of families that were positive calls about their children.

To help families meet one another, schools drew up lists of names and addresses of families, by classroom, and also by bus routes which were made available to families. These are all examples provided by participating schools of steps taken during the year to make their schools more "user friendly" for parents.

One site sent in comments from parent evaluations asking what strengths they had seen at the school to make it more inviting. The following responses are an endorsement of project efforts:

> "Lots of parent involvement; the smiling faces of (the principal) and teachers. Whenever it is necessary to be at school during the day it makes you feel good; a positive openness in communcation between parents and staff."

Change in Response to Parent Concerns

Some of the changes instituted by schools in response to parent concerns included installing lights in the parking area one month after parents raised the concern that the parking area was too dark. Posting bus routes, in response to parent request. Making a change in how the school deals with kindergarten on half-days. Changes in the school lunch program. Instituting more flexible time for parent/teacher conferences. Making changes in how home-school communications are sent home so it is easier for parents to find information they need.

Making changes in the kindergarten/preschool orientation program. (It was felt they did a good job of helping prepare children to be separated from parents, but needed to address helping parents separate from children.) Setting up a schedule of meetings with parents before school starts so that the first meeting doesn't occur as late as the first parent/teacher conference. Putting through a budget allocation for a parent coordinator position.

Several concerns raised by parents were responded to by appropriate school personnel and the explanations satisfied the concern without further changes. One was concern over reassignment of children because of a teacher leaving just before school started. Another was a request for

changes in the bus routes which could not be accommodated. Another was a concern about whether there was a dress code for teachers -- there was not, but teachers had not been aware that this was a matter of concern to some parents.

'Spin-offs' From the Parent Leadership Program

Several "spin-offs" have occurred at Parent Leadership training sites. Interest resulting from parent leadership workshops on communication between parents and children led to initiation of parenting classes by another agency in the community. At another school, the interest begun in the workshops developed into a support group among parents of children with special needs.

The response of parents to the home learning activities offered at the parent leadership workshops resulted in a decision at one school to have home learning activities to send home for all children at every grade level. Recognition of the value of the home contacts made by a parent on one of the teams led to funding of a Parent Involvement Coordinator position.

At several sites, visitors form other schools have taken away ideas to implement at their own schools, and administrators have been impressed enough to want to expand from one school to district-wide implementation of the program.

STRATEGIES EFFECTIVE IN ELICITING AND RESPONDING TO PARENT CONCERNS

Two of the high ranking schools on the School Change Index used a survey to tap parents' feelings about the school, and things they thought would make it better. At one site, the survey was given to parents to fill

out during the first fall workshop. By the next meeting the surveys had been summarized: some responses tallied and other written responses compiled with writtten copies to go to all parents. The recorder noted the reaction:

> "Parents were thrilled that we had listened to and summarized their concerns and strengths of (our school). By the second session we had taken ACTION on some of their concerns and they could see that what they said made a difference."

In the other school a survey was sent to parents and another survey to teachers asking about such things as frequency of contact with parents, method of contact, time of first contact between parent and teacher; opinion of home/school communication and how it could be improved; opinion about teachers sending home suggestions for home learning activities; how satisfactory conferences were and how they could be improved, etc.

Copies of this survey instrument could be obtained from Citizens Education Center if another site wanted to use it as a model. A staff person from Citizens Education Center worked with the site in developing the survey.

This was sent to a sample of parents and to all teachers and got a fairly high rate of return. As a result of the survey the school made many changes. This included major revisions in how home/school written communications would be handled. Another was to change the scheduling of their first meeting with parents. The teachers had not been unaware until they did the survey of how long after the start of school it was before they made contact with some parents, so a schedule to ensure earlier contact was set up.

Another of the high ranking sites instituted a "pink sheet" system. This referred to the color of a form available to all parent workshops for parents to write in concerns they had about anything at the school. The pink sheets were collected after every parent meeting and the team saw to it that a response was made. Sometimes the concerns had to do with bussing -- and the bus manager was called upon to respond. Sometimes it had to do with school lunches and the appropriate person in charge of that program was contacted. In the case of the busses, the concern was general enough that an entire workshop was set up as a response. In other cases, problems were solved, or explanations given that satisfied the person raising the concern. In any event the concern was posted, and the response was also posted on a bulletin board so that parents could see that the school was listening and promptly dealing with issues that had been raised.

The beauty of this system was that it was ongoing -- a continuing way of tapping parent concerns and enabling the school to respond, whereas the survey approach was a one-time, or once a year tapping of parent concerns.

An informal "system" set in motion by the parent leadership program was the high visibility it gave to members of the team. Parents came to know them from the meetings and find them very approachable, so they became a conduit for parental concerns that might otherwise have remained unvoiced.

The fourth of the high ranking sites was the site where all the teachers made up the team (this was a small school setting).

All of the teachers attended the sessions. At the sessions parents raised concerns. The recorder described the process of communication on these concerns as follows:

> "Issues were brought up; initial response was that teachers took notes and promised to discuss, plan together, and try to implement positive change where appropriate.
> Examples: --Orientation for kindergarten should help parents feel comfortable "letting go" as well as helping children feel comfortable starting school;
> --conferences should be more personal, parents need more preparation for them;
> --parents want to know how to help kids at home;
> --options need to be offered for working parents, parents without babysitters, etc."

The recorder from this site described the ways in which the team attempted to keep open its line of communiaction with parents:

> "We tried to make an immediate visible response to parents' requests, to encourage more input (i.e., "please post the bus routes" and we did so immediately)".

Similarly, staff planning undertook to respond to requested changes in kindergarten orientation and they have let parents know that these changes "are in the works" for next year. They have also made plans for changes in conference procedures.

Teachers at this site have installed "suggestion boxes" outside their doors. A special form was not developed for parents comments, but parents were encouraged to write their comments and concerns and were assured the staff would pay attention to their input.

The findings on methods used by parent leadership teams to make the schools responsive to parent concerns is given in Figure 10, which follows:

FIGURE 10. INITIATING SCHOOL CHANGE

Methods Used by Schools to Learn of Parent Concerns and Respond to Them

*Doing a survey in which parents are asked what the school could be doing better.

*Having a method for parents to voice their concerns, and taking responsibility to seek a response.

*Making public both the concern raised, and the type of response that was given.

*Providing a regular forum in which parents can communicate with school staff.

*Acting promptly on parental requests that can be readily fulfilled in order to demonstrate school willingness to listen and to change.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation questions addressed in Part One were as follows:

What program strategies are most effective in reaching all parents using the Parent Leadership Training model?

What program strategies are particularly effective in reaching parents traditionally considered "hard-to-reach"-- fathers, low income parents, ethnic and language minorities?

The strategies that lead to more parent participation are described in detail in the body of this evaluation. However, there are some common threads that run through them.

Principle One -- The schools must reach out to parents in new ways. This means personalized recruitment of parents in such a way that they know that they, personally, will be missed if they do not attend. It means making special arrangements to overcome barriers that might keep them from attending -- need for child care, transportation, language barriers. It means not being satisfied with a "good turnout" if it is clear that the "already committed" are the ones that came, and that large segments of the families in the school are not represented.

Principle Two -- Communication between the parent and school needs to be two-way. If the school seeks parental input in planning parent/school events, if they seek parent suggestions for things they would like to change about the school and respond to some of these, it will establish a different relationship between school staff and parents. Communication is two-way, telling and listening. The old way was the school telling and parent listening. School staff needs to demonstrate

through actions that they are also listening. And there needs to be a format for exchange between parents and staff -- an ongoing program which brings them together, to achieve an active partnership.

Principle Three -- the workshops and others events set up for parents need to be interactive to sustain parent interest. Workshops that focus primarily on presentations, instructive information designed to inform and improve parents, do not draw repeat attendance. Workshops or other activities in which there is much time for discussion and participation by parents do attract a continuing involvement.

Part Two of the evaluation addressed the following evaluation question:

What strategies have school sites used that led to more active participation by teachers and other school personnel in parent involvement activities?

The findings reported were that teachers and other school staff are more likely to participate if they feel a personal commitment that parent involvement is important to children's learning. They are more likely to participate if they are personally asked to fulfill a specific role, and less likely if the request is for "any volunteer" or the request to "get behind this effort". They are more likely to participate if their participation is noticed and appreciated and has the support of the school administration.

Part Three answered the final evaluation question:

How have Parent Leadership Training activities led to institutional change in schools that implement it?

The findings in this area are quite preliminary. It is clear that most sites that set up a process of two-way communication with parents through the Parent Leadership Training model became more responsive to parents leading to many changes--in school policies and programs and in changes to the school environment. The characteristics of programs where this occured indicate that some type of mechanism has been set up to elicit parent concerns and respond to them. This has been both formal and informal. Formal mechanisms have included carrying out surveys and using the team in charge of Parent Leadership to initiate response by the school. Another formal mechanism used was to set up a process for response to parent concerns -- a form passed out at the end of parent meetings and a bulletin board on which the concerns and the school responses would be posted by the next meeting; a suggestion box outside of teacher rooms; a parent bulletin board with a place to record input and concerns.

The informal ways to elicit parent concerns include the team meetings to implement Parent Leadership -- made up of parents, teachers and administrators. The team becomes sensitized to the way parents might respond to the school and thinks of ways to make this response more favorable (maps to help find the office or student rooms, pictures to help identify school personnel, a parent handbook with useful information). The other informal process operating is that the recurring parent leadership workshops and other events make the participating school staff more visible and accessible to parents and members of the community. They then become conduits for parent concerns that might otherwise never reach school staff.

The final conclusion to be drawn from this evaluation is that the Parent Leadership Training model involves a partnership between parents, school staff and the school as an institution. It sets up a process whereby changes occur not just among parents but among school personnel and in the school as an institution, drawing them into a closer partnership. The title for the program "Parent Leadership Training" is therefore inappropriate to the present model because it's total focus is on parents. It might more accurately be called "Training for School/Parent Partnerships". It appears to be a very powerful model for helping schools become more attuned to the cultural diversity and changed life styles in the families they serve.